



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

In Reply, Please Refer to  
File No.

Washington, D.C. 20535

April 9, 1980

~~SECRET~~

ATTEMPTED ASSASSINATION OF  
BERNARDO LEIGHTON,  
OCTOBER 6, 1975, ROME, ITALY

DECLASSIFIED BY SP5JC/bj  
ON 2-2-99 # 99-107

On April 17, 1978, Michael Vernon Townley, self admitted officer for the National Directorate of Intelligence (DINA), advised Special Agents (SAs) of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) that during the late summer and early fall of 1975, he, his wife, Mariana Callejas Townley, and Virgilio Pablo Paz Romero, member of the anti-Castro Cuban exile terrorist organization, the Cuban Nationalist Movement (CNM), traveled extensively throughout Europe. Townley advised that he, Paz, and his wife visited Rome, Italy, during the early fall of 1975 and were in contact with various members of an Italian fascist organization. Townley advised that members of this Italian fascist organization indicated that former Chilean Vice President Bernardo Leighton had been identified as a dangerous catalyst that would be the basis of the formation of a coalition between the Christian Democratic Party (PCD) and the Socialist Party (PS) in Italy during the forthcoming elections. Townley advised that members of the Italian fascist organization advised that Leighton was accepted as a prominent spokesman for the PCD in Italy, and that Leighton had excellent contacts among members of the PS in Italy. Townley identified one of the principal members of the Italian fascist organization as Alfredo Di Stefano, who was also known by the nickname Topogigio (The Doll). Townley advised that after visiting Italy, he and his wife returned to Chile, while Paz returned to the United States in order to renew his activities with the CNM. (S) (u)

Virgilio Pablo Paz Romero, supra, is a Federal fugitive being sought by the FBI for his participation in the September 21, 1976, assassination of former Chilean Ambassador Orlando Letelier and his assistant, Ronnie Moffitt, in Washington, D.C.

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Reason for Extension FCIM, II, 1-2.4.2 (2)

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ALL INFORMATION CONTAINED  
HEREIN IS UNCLASSIFIED EXCEPT  
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On October 6, 1975, Bernardo Leighton, supra, and his wife were shot by unidentified gunmen near their home in a Rome, Italy, street. (U)

On November 4, 1975, the Associated Press (AP), Miami, Florida, received a letter postmarked Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, containing a typewritten communique in the Spanish language. A translation of this communique is as follows: (U)

"The secret organization of 'Zero' is taking responsibility for Orlando Masferrer's assassination, which took place on October 31, 1975, of this year in Miami, Florida. (U)

"His divisionist labor, blackmail, and his efforts to undermine anti-Communist struggle, together with information we received from our intelligence division, connecting him with the Cuban G-2, has earned him the right to receive justice from the Cuban exiles. (U)

"This distortionist, informant, liar, old gangster, Trotsky agent, etc., received what he deserved as all others who continue his work will receive. We know who they are. His execution, like the one of Jose Elias De La Torriente, will serve as examples for those who mock the fight for Cuba's freedom. (U)

"In order to obtain Cuba's liberty, we must first cleanse the exiles. (U)

"Signed 'The Zero'. (U)

"100 by the IH=3." (U)

"Addendum: we wanted to add that Mr. Bernardo Leighton was shot through the back of his head in Rome. A nine millimeter Baretta was used. We are informing you of this to contradict reports which were printed by the news media and to identify them fully." (U)

Orlando Masferrer was a Cuban exile leader and a resident of Miami, Florida, who was killed when his car exploded at 6775 S.W. 27th Street, Miami, Florida, October 31, 1975, as a result of a detonation of an improvised explosive device. (U)

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On April 12, 1974, another anti-Castro Cuban exile leader, Jose Elias De La Torriente, was assassinated by an unidentified sniper in Coral Gables, Florida. A so-called "Zero" note was found by investigating officers at the scene of the crime. (U)

Subsequent to the April 17, 1978, interview, Townley advised SAs of the FBI that the group called Zero was a nom de guerre of the CNM. Townley further advised that details related to the assassination attempt against Bernardo Leighton in Rome, which were conveyed to the AP by the Zero organization, had been provided to Paz in order to allow the CNM through the Zero organization, to take credit for the attempted assassination, so that the CNM would gain stature as a viable international terrorist organization. In addition, Townley advised that Alfredo De Stefano, who had characterized Leighton as a "dangerous catalyst", had been involved in the takeover of the Italian Ministry of the Interior several years previously. (U)

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On March 25, 1978, [REDACTED] a source of the FBI, [REDACTED] members of the CNM for the assassination of Orlando Letelier, advised that [REDACTED] told him that same day that the CNM killed Letelier. [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
(U)

Orlando Letelier was the former Chilean Ambassador to the United States, who was assassinated on September 21, 1976, in Washington, D.C., when an improvised explosive device detonated underneath the automobile he was driving. Also killed with Letelier was his assistant, Mrs. Ronnie Moffitt, who was a passenger in Letelier's automobile. (U)

Guillermo Novo Sampol and Alvin Ross Diaz were convicted after a jury trial in United States District Court (USDC), Washington, D.C. (WDC), on February 14, 1979, for conspiracy to assassinate a foreign official, namely Letelier, and two counts of first degree murder, for which they received consecutive life sentences. Both are now incarcerated in maximum security prisons within the United States. A third

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member of the CNM, Ignacio Novo Sampol, was convicted on various charges relating to the Letelier matter, but was not convicted of murder counts and is currently serving an 8 - 13 year sentence in a maximum security prison in the United States. (U)

Guillermo Novo Sampol is the leader of the CNM. Alvin Ross Diaz is a founding member of the CNM. Ignacio Novo Sampol, brother of Guillermo Novo Sampol, is also a well known former officer of the CNM, who was a founding member of that organization. (U)

The June 21, 1978, edition of the Washington Post on page C-4 carried an article entitled, "Two victims of assassin back in Chile." The article stated that former Senator Bernardo Leighton and his wife, Anita, who survived an assassination attempt in Rome three years ago, returned to Chile today after four years of exile. The article was datelined Santiago, Chile. The article reported as follows: (U)

"Hundreds of persons greeted Leighton and his wife, Anita, when they arrived in Santiago. (U)

"Leighton, 68, was allowed to return to Chile with his wife under the terms of a political amnesty decree issued in April, 1978. (U)

"Former Chilean President Eduardo Frei, along with other supporters of Leighton's banned Christian Democratic Party, also greeted him. (U)

"Mrs. Leighton was shot in the back and partially paralyzed in the October 6, 1975, assassination attempt, in which her husband, Bernardo Leighton, was severely wounded in the head. It was one of three attempted murders abroad of prominent opponents of the ruling military regime of incumbent Chilean President Augusto Pinochet. (U)

"No one has been arrested in the attempt on Leighton's life." (U)

On March 25, 1980, a reliable source who has furnished reliable information in the past, advised [REDACTED] Colonel Pedro Espinosa Bravo, the Director of Operations for DINA, and Michael Vernon Townley, who was in Rome, Italy, at that time. Source reported [REDACTED] September or early October, 1975. (U)

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B Source noted that Alfredo (Last Name Unknown) (LNU) - a member of an Italian fascist organization, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Colonel Espinosa and Townley. According to the source, Espinosa was overheard screaming [REDACTED] that Carlos Altamirano should be assassinated at all costs, by Townley. The source advised [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Alfredo LNU, during which the latter dissuaded Townley from any attempt against the life of Altamirano, inasmuch as such an attempt would be a "suicide mission." Source noted that Altamirano apparently was visiting Rome, Italy, and his visit had come to the attention of DINA. Source advised that Alfredo LNU informed Townley that his group would attempt to assassinate Bernardo Leighton instead of Altamirano. Source advised that Townley acquiesced to Alfredo LNU's urging and indicated that he would take no action against Altamirano. (X)(u)

Carlos Altamirano Orrego was the Secretary General of the Chilean PS. He was also a PS Senator during the government of Salvador Allende in Chile. He was an outspoken advocate of violent revolution in order to bring about social changes in Chile. He is also a self proclaimed Marxist. (U)

Source advised that the assassination of Altamirano was a priority task which had been ordered by the Director of DINA, General Manuel Contreras Sepulveda. The source noted that General Contreras had an illogical obsession with accomplishing Altamirano's demise, and, to that end, General Contreras had issued standing orders that all DINA agents operating abroad were to assassinate Altamirano on sight should information be developed that he was in their locality. Source noted that most DINA operatives and agents recognized that Altamirano was a dividing force in the Popular Unity (UP) government in exile, and that the best interests of the present Chilean military junta would be served by allowing Altamirano to live and continue his divisive activities throughout the exiled UP community abroad. Notwithstanding that fact, the source noted that General Contreras had initiated a personal vendetta against Altamirano and desired at all costs to accomplish his assassination. (X)(u)